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The INN OF REST



MAY
RILEY
SMITH

author of
"SOMETIME"

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THE INN OF REST.

LATER POEMS.

BY

MAY RILEY SMITH,
AUTHOR OF "SOMETIME." ETC.



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THE INN OF REST.

TOILING among my garden thorns one day,
While in a stirless swoon the hot air lay,
 A traveller passed toward the glowing west,
 Who seemed intent upon some cheerful quest,
For with a song he did beguile the way.
 Perhaps some question stirred within my eyes,
 For thus he spake : " In yonder valley lies,
Among the murmurous trees, the Inn called *Rest* ;
 Where all the pillows are with poppies strewn,
 Where toil-worn feet are shod with silken shoon,
And bed of down awaits each jaded guest ;
I haste at this good Inn to make request,
 For see ! the dial marks the hour of noon."
" God grant," I cried, " you reach that threshold
 soon ! "

The singer passed, and in the winding lane,
I lost, at length, the thread of his refrain.
 One Sabbath eve, consoled and comforted
 By chant and prayer at Vesper-service said,

With a *laus Deo* thrilling through my pain,
I left the church, and careless where I went,
Behind its ivied walls my footsteps bent,
Among the low green tents where dwell the dead ;
The chill winds sobbed among the grasses sere
Which thatched the narrow roofs. The sky was
drear,
And drops of rain fell on my down-bent head.
Turning to go, upon a stone I read
A name, and dropped upon these words a tear :
“ He sought an Inn of Rest, and found it—here.”

IF I COULD CHOOSE.

I WOULD not dare, though it were offered me,
To plan my lot for but a single day ,
So sure am I that all my life would be
Marked with a blot in token of my sway.

But were it granted me this day to choose
One shining bead from the world's jeweled string,
Favor and fortune I would quick refuse
To grasp a richer and more costly thing.

With this brave talisman upon my breast,
I could be ruler of my rebel soul ;
To own this gem is to command the rest :
It is the Kohinoor called Self-Control !

It is the wicket-gate to broad estates,
To peaceful slopes and mountains blue and fair ;
Calm-browed Content beyond its border waits,
And even Love sits in the sunshine there.

No sullen faces frown upon the street,
No grated windows, no grim prison walls ;
No clanking chains are bound on convict's feet,
And on the ear no angry discord falls.

My life's swift river widens to the sea,
The careless babble of the brook is past ;
A few late roses blossom still for me,
But spring is gone, and summer cannot last.

Had I begun with morning's rosy strength
To seek the flower that on life's summit grows,
I might have found my edelweis at length,
And on the purple heights have gained repose.

But I have loitered, and the hour is late ;
Worn are my feet, and weary is my hand ;
I can but push ajar the massive gate,
I can but look into the Beulah land.

But, friends, if my poor love could have its way,
And blossom into blessing on each soul,
This is the very prayer that I should pray :
"Grant to men's lives the power of self-control!"

L I N I N G S .

NAY, nay, dear child, I cannot let you slight
Those inner stitches on your gown's fair hem
Because, you say, they will be out of sight,
And no stern critic will discover them.

You do but build a most inviting hedge,
Behind which falsehood and deceit may lurk,
When you embroider fair the outer edge,
And to the inner give no honest work.

The silken chain of habit which you wear
So lightly now upon your careless youth
Will strengthen strand by strand ; then have a care !
Else it may throttle the sweet soul of truth.

I hold that every stitch untruly set
Weaves a soiled thread along your web of fate ;
And each deceitful seam may prove a net
To hurt and hinder, trust me, soon or late.

Ah, dearest child, on everything you do
Let the white seal of honor stamp its grace.
Keep all your soul as clean with heaven's dew
As the pink flower of your tender face.

God makes no clumsy linings. Mark this bloom !
A "fairy's glove"; and though it grieves my heart
To send the smallest blossom to its tomb,
We'll tear the dainty little glove apart.

In this and every flower that we behold,
From crimson rose to pansy's purple vest,
God sews the velvet on the inner fold,
And makes His linings fairer than the rest.

Is it not perfect, from the slender stem
To the brown dapples on the curling rim ?
God folds not carelessly the foxglove's hem ;
Then try, my little child, to be like Him.

COMPENSATION.

SHE folded up the worn and mended frock
And smoothed it tenderly upon her knee,
Then through the soft web of a wee red sock
She wove the bright wool, musing thoughtfully,
“ Can this be all? The great world is so fair,
I hunger for its green and pleasant ways,
A cripple prisoned in her restless chair,
Looks from her window with a wistful gaze.

“ The fruits I cannot reach are red and sweet,
The paths forbidden are both green and wide ;
O God ! there is no boon to helpless feet
So altogether sweet as paths denied.
Home is most fair : bright are my household fires,
And children are a gift without alloy :
But who would bound the field of her desires
By the prim hedges of mere fireside joy ?

“ I can but weave a faint thread to and fro,
Making a frail woof in a baby's sock ;

Into the world's sweet tumult I would go,
At its strong gates my trembling hand would knock."
Just then the children came, the father too,
Their eager faces lit the twilight gloom,
"Dear heart," he whispered, as he nearer drew,
"How sweet it is within this little room !

"God puts my strongest comfort here to draw
When thirst is great, and common wells are dry.
Your pure desire is my unerring law ;
Tell me, dear one, who is so safe as I ?
Home is the pasture where my soul may feed,
This room a paradise has grown to be,
And only where these patient feet shall lead
Can it be home for these dear ones and me."

He touched with reverent hand the helpless feet,
The children crowded close and kissed her hair.
"Our mother is so good, and kind, and sweet,
There's not another like her anywhere !"
The baby in her low bed opened wide
The soft blue flowers of her timid eyes,
And viewed the group about the cradle side
With smiles of glad and innocent surprise.

The mother drew the baby to her knee

And smiling, said : " The stars shine soft to-night ;

My world is fair ; its hedges sweet to me,

And whatsoever is, dear Lord, is right ! "

M A R C H .

IN the dark silence of her chambers low,
March works out sweeter things than mortals know.

Her noiseless looms ply on with busy care,
Weaving the fine cloth that the flowers wear.

She sews the seams in violet's queer hood,
And paints the sweet arbutus of the wood.

Out of a bit of sky's delicious blue
She fashions hyacinths, and harebells, too ;

And from a sunbeam makes a cowslip fair,
Or spins a gown for daffodil to wear.

She pulls the cover from the crocus beds,
And bids the sleepers lift their drowsy heads.

“ Come, early risers ! Come, anemone,
My pale wind-flower ! ” cheerily calls she.

“The world expects you, and your lovers wait
To give you welcome at spring's open gate!”

She marshals the close armies of the grass,
And polishes their green blades as they pass.

And all the blossoms of the fruit trees sweet
Are piled in rosy shells about her feet.

Within her great alembic she distills
The dainty odors which each flower fills.

Nor does she err, and give to mignonette
The perfume which belongs to violet.

Nature does well whatever task she tries,
Because obedient. Here the secret lies.

What matter then that wild the March winds blow?
Bear patiently her lingering frost and snow!

For all the sweet beginnings of the spring
Beneath her cold brown breast lie fluttering.

WHITE VIOLETS.

WE sought for the white violet,
 My little love and I :
Among the pastures cool and wet,
Our feet in eager quest were set
 The dainty bloom to spy.

We knew where purple ones and blue
 Were thick as stars at night ;
But all our forest journeys through
We had not found a spot where grew
 A violet of white.

Like some sweet nun, ethereal thin,
 You'd know her anywhere,
With snowy wimple folded in
About her pale and serious chin,
 And head bent as in prayer.

In ferny cloisters, spicy-sweet,
 We sought our pale-faced nun.
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No trace was here of her light feet,
Only a spider, trim and neat,
Sat in the door and spun.

Where the May-apple leaves had spread
A tent of shining green,
A moth in his gray hammock staid,
A hermit snail sulked in the shade,
But Violet was not seen.

The snowy star of Bethlehem
Twinkled beside our way:
The forest's fern-embroidered hem
Glowed with red lilies, stem on stem,
But where did Violet stay?

"Why seek white violets alone,
My love?" at last I cried;
"When banks with purple ones are strown,
Fit for the cover of a throne,
And coronet beside!"

"Things won," she said, "with little care
Are seldom coveted;

White violets, like pearls, are rare,
Like amethysts the purple are,
I choose the pearls," she said.

We heard the insects' drowsy croon,
Bees in the thistles slept ;
The wood-thrush piped his liquid tune,
The morn led up to sultry noon,
The noon to evening crept.

We found not one white violet ;
We know not where they grow.
But there are fairer treasures yet,
Sometimes, in woods and hollows wet
As we who found them know.

WHAT WILL IT MATTER?

WHAT will it matter in a little while

That for a day

We met and gave a word, a touch, a smile,

Upon the way?

What will it matter whether hearts were brave,

And lives were true;

That you gave me the sympathy I crave,

As I gave you?

These trifles! Can it be they make or mar

A human life?

Are souls as lightly swayed as rushes are,

By love, or strife?

Yea, yea! a look the fainting heart may break,

Or make it whole;

And just one word, if said for love's sweet sake,

May save a soul!

CROSS-PURPOSES.

WHAT sorrow we should beckon unawares,
What stinging nettles in our path would grow,
If God should answer all our thoughtless prayers,
Or bring to harvest the poor seed we sow !

The storm for which you prayed, whose kindly shock
Revived your fields, and blessed the fainting air,
Drove a strong ship upon the cruel rock,
And one I loved went down in shipwreck there.

I ask for sunshine on my grapes to-day ;
You plead for rain to kiss your drooping flowers ;
And thus within God's patient hand we lay
These intricate cross-purposes of ours.

I greeted with cold grace and doubting fears
The guest who proved an angel at my side ;
And I have shed more bitter, burning tears
Because of hopes fulfilled than prayers denied.

Then be not clamorous, O restless soul,
But hold thy trust in God's eternal plan !
He views our life's dull weaving as a whole ;
Only its tangled threads are seen by man !

Dear Lord, vain repetitions are not meet
When we would bring our messages to Thee.
Help us to lay them then at Thy dear feet
In acquiescence, not garrulity !

THE WEARY MODEL.

ONE day, an artist in his studio,
 Upon his model draped a quaint old gown,
Of some rare Indian stuff, wove long ago
 Of countless mellow shades of gold and brown;
Sunshine and shadow, like the shining hair
That Raphael made his sweet Madonnas wear.

Silent and passive, as if carved of stone,
 Stood the young model in her loveliness;
For now the tireless artist sought alone
 To paint the gold-brown shimmer of the dress;
Nor must she stir the robe which flashed and shone—
Hers to be patient and be wrought upon.

At last the sinuous folds were all complete;
 Like a soft wave they bathed the pliant girl,
And, rippling from the shoulders to the feet,
 Fell on the carpet in a silken swirl:
And then the artist on his canvas wrought,
Trying to paint the language of his thought.

All day the colors from his pencil flowed,
Until it seemed as if some wondrous spell
Possessed the hour, and like a radiance glowed
In the fair lines that on his canvas fell:
And as the hours, down-shod, went slipping past,
His dream of fame seemed blossoming at last.

See how the witchery of that old dress
Makes a soft mirror of the canvas, where,
With something like a lover's tenderness,
He adds faint glints of lustre here and there!
Almost to his quick fancy the folds stir
With their old scents of rosemary and myrrh!

Just then the weary girl forgetful grew
And swept a hand along each flowing line,
Alas, a hundred ripples straightway flew
In answer to that little heedless sign!
The glistening folds were changed from belt to hem,
All the familiar grace gone out of them.

The startled girl looked in the artist's face
And read the story of his loss and pain.
She could not call the lines back to their place,

Regret and sighing were alike in vain.
Naught can revive an inspiration dead ;
The golden vision had forever fled !

What lesson, oh, my soul, is here for thee
That chidest this poor model over-much ?
To stand henceforth more still and patiently
Beneath the fashioning of God's fine touch !
For ah, what grace by the Great Artist planned
Has been effaced by thy impatient hand !

THE LOST CHRISTMAS.

"Seek ye first the King."

THE Russian peasants tell to-day
A legend old and dear to them,
How, when the wise men went their way
To find the Babe at Bethlehem,

They paused to let their camels rest
Beside a peasant's lowly door ;
And all intent upon their quest
They talked their sacred errand o'er.

"Come with us," said the eager three ;
"Come, seek with us the heavenly Child ;
What prouder honor can there be
For mortals, sinful and defiled ?

"And bid each child in Sunday clothes
Bring of his treasures the most rare,
Bundles of myrrh and whitest doves,
With ointment for the Christ-King's hair.

“ Who knows what blessing may befall
If they but touch His garment's hem ?
And only once for them and all
Will Christ be born at Bethlehem ! ”

“ Alas ! I have *so much* to do,”
The mother answered with a sigh ;
“ I cannot journey now with you,
But I will follow by and by.”

The wise men frowned and rode away,
Leaving the children all aglow,
And pleading through that busy day,
“ When may we go ? When may we go ? ”

And while their cheeks flushed rosy red,
They shouted in a chorus sweet :
“ And may we touch His pretty head ?
And may we kiss His blessed feet ? ”

But women still will bake and brew,
No matter what sweet honors wait ;
And petty tasks they still must do,
Though angels tarry at the gate !

And when the frocks were sewn with lace,
And tied with ribbons smart and trim :
When each tear-stained and tired face
Was bathed and tied its hood within ;

When the small rooms were cleanly swept,
And chairs set primly in a row,
Betokening a house well-kept,
And wearily she turned to go,

The sky was purpling in the west,
The silent night was hurrying on ;
The three wise men had onward pressed,
The star from out the east had gone !

What could the foolish mother do ?
She turned her footsteps home again ;
And never, all her sad life through,
Did she behold the three wise men.

Alas ! Through weak delaying she
Her sweetest privilege had missed ;
Nor ever did her children see
The Holy Babe they might have kissed.

WE ARE UNFAITHFUL.

If man could rule, his love of change would mar
The purple dignity that wraps the hills ;
Pluck out from the blue sky some perfect star,
And set it elsewhere, as his fancy wills ;

Train the gnarled apple-tree more straightly up ;
Lift violet's head, so long and meekly bowed :
With some new odor fill her purple cup,
And gild the rosy fringes of a cloud.

For, mark ! Last year I loved the violet best,
And tied her tender colors in my hair ;
To-day I wear on my inconstant breast
A crimson rose, and count her just as fair.

We are unfaithful. Only God is true
To hold secure the landmarks of the past ,
To paint year after year the harebell blue
And in the same sweet mold its shape to cast.

O, steadfast Nature, let us learn of thee !

Thou canst create a new flower at thy will,
And yet, through all the years canst faithful be
To the sweet pattern of a daffodil.

THREE SCORE AND TEN.

I AM past my three score years and ten ;

I have quaffed full cups of bliss and bane ,
Grown drunk on folly like other men,
With its present sweet and after-pain ;
I have had my share of cloud and sun ;
And what is it all, when all is done ?

We have had our frolic, Life and I ;

Jovial comrades we used to be.
Full sails to-day, with a silver sky,
Anon dead calm and a sullen sea.
Now I fear the waves, so I hug the shore
With my tattered sail and broken oar.

I have worn love's flower upon my breast,

And said my prayers to a woman's face.
The saints forgive us ! If men addressed
Such orisons to the heavenly Grace,
They would upward mount, as strong birds do,
And answer bring from the heavenly blue !

I have known the best that life can hold
Of fame and fortune, love and power.
And when my riotous blood grew cold,
I cheered with books the lingering hour ;
Banqueting on the costly wine
Which Genius pours from her flagons fine.

Yet I would rather lie to-day
Where orchard blooms drift down their snow,
And feel lost youth in my pulses play,
Its rosy wine in my hot cheeks glow ;
I would rather be young,—and foolish, forsooth,—
Than own the baubles we buy with youth.

I would barter fortune, fame, and power,
All knowledge gained of books and men,
For my old delight at the first spring flower,
A robin's egg, or a captured wren
From its nest hid under the tossing plume
Of a sweet, old-fashioned lilac bloom.

With the world's stale feast I am surfeited :
I long to-day for the old-time thrill

At the purple pomp of a pansy bed,

Or the fresh spring scent of a daffodil.

Alas, I shall never be thrilled again!

I am old. Yes; past three score and ten.

DEAD BIRDS AND EASTER.

It was an Easter Sunday bright and calm,
And life—not death—was the glad theme that day;
The air was full of spring's delicious balm,
The maple buds were drooping on the way,
And one sweet leaf, with flush of crimson on it,
Fell on the dead birds of a woman's bonnet.

What say the bells at these good Easter times?
They tell of vanquished death and risen life.
Hush, then, O bells, your inconsistent chimes,
You and the dull old world are hard at strife;
For surely, when the crimson leaf fell on it,
I saw dead birds upon a woman's bonnet!

What does it cost, this garniture of death?
It costs the life which God alone can give;
It costs dull silence where was music's breath;
It costs dead joy, that foolish pride may live.
Ah, life, and joy, and song, depend upon it,
Are costly trimmings for a woman's bonnet!

Oh, who would stop the sweet pulse of a lark,
That flutters in such ecstasy of bliss,
Or lay a robin's bright breast cold and stark,
For such a paltry recompense as this?
Oh, you who love your babies, think upon it,
Mothers are slaughtered, just to trim your bonnet!

Will Herod never cease to rule the land,
That we must slay sweet innocence so?
Is joy so cheap, or happiness sure planned?
Tell me, O friend, who art acquaint with Woe!
Does thy sad heart proclaim no protest on it?
Wouldst *thou* slay happiness, just for a bonnet?

And must God's choirs that through His forests rove,
Granting sweet *matinées* to high and low,
Must His own orchestra of field and grove,
Himself their leader, be disbanded so?
Nay, nay, O God, proclaim Thy ban upon it:
Guard Thy dear birds from sport, and greed, and bonnet!

Their fine-spun hammocks swinging in the breeze
Should be as safe as babies' cradles are,
And no rude hand that tears them from the trees,
Or dares a sweet bird's property to mar,

Deserves a woman's touch or kiss upon it,
Unless—she wears dead birds upon her bonnet !

Dead birds ! and dead for gentle woman's sake,
 To feed awhile her vanity's poor breath ;
And yet the foolish bells sweet clamor make
 And tell of One whose power hath vanquished death !
Ah, Easter-time has a reproach upon it
While birds are slain to trim a woman's bonnet !

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